THE ADOPTED ALGONQUIAN TERM "POQUOSIN"[1]

By WILLIAM WALLACE TOOKER

Among our numerous adopted Indian words the subject of this essay survives in local parlance in some parts of the Carolinas, Virginia, and Maryland, as a topographical term for low lands or marshes. Its lexicographical variations are *pocoson*, Worcester (1846); *pocoson*, or *poquoson*, Bartlett (1859); *pocosan*, De Vere (1872); *pocosin*, in the Century Dictionary, and *pocoson* and *poquoson*, in the Standard Dictionary. As it is surely time for lexicographers to agree on some standard spelling, we have selected '*poquosin*'—a form more generally prevailing in print and representing more clearly the original phraseology—as the proper spelling.

These swamps, wrote the late Prof. J. D. Whitney,[2] "are locally known as '*dismals*,' and also as '*pocosins*,' the latter word being apparently an aboriginal name, and, if so, one of the very few instances (if not the only one) in which a word of this kind has become—to a limited extent, it is true—generalized as a topographical designation."

Mr W. G. Stanard, who has devoted much study to the land patents and other records of Virginia, writes[3]: "*Poquoson* is an Indian word meaning marsh or low ground. There is frequent mention in the patents of land being bounded by, or being in part a '*poquoson*.' Not long ago a North Carolina paper referred to the '*poquoson* lands' on the Roanoke."

[1] The writer must acknowledge his indebtedness to Albert Matthews, Esq., of Boston, for collating the extracts relating to the use of the word '*poquosin*,' without which this paper probably would not have been written. If those desirous of learning the meaning of our early Algonquian place-names would be as thorough in their search for early forms as Mr Matthews has been in this instance, there would be less difficulty in tracing their etymology.

[2] *Names and Places*, 1888, p. 211.

[3] *Virginia Mag. of Hist. and Biog.*, vol. IV, 1896, p. 202.

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The earliest printed examples of this topographical application are given by John Lawson,[1] as follows: "As we row'd up the [Santee] River, we found the Land towards the mouth and for about sixteen miles up it, scarce anything but swamp and *percoarson*, affording vast Ciprus-trees of which the French make canoes." On the margin of this page (9) occurs "*Percoarson*, a sort of low land." Lawson further recites: "The swamp I now spoke of, is not a miry bog, as others generally are, but you go down to it thro' a steep Bank, at the Foot of which begins this valley, where you may go dry for perhaps 200 yards then you meet with a small Brook, or Run of water, about 2 or 3 feet deep, then dry Land for such another Space, so another Brook, thus continuing, the Land in this *Percoarson* Valley, being exceedingly rich." Again he wrote: "The first night we lay in a rich *perkoson* or low ground, that was hard by a creek, and good dry land." In the 1860 edition of Lawson's work, the word is modernized as '*Pocoson*.'

A deed of 1714[2] mentions the following boundaries "to an old gum standing by the side of a *Poquoson*, dividing this land, and the land now in the possession of John Dawley, thence running down the East side of s^{d} run *poquoson* and marsh to muddy creek." William Byrd[3] (1729) frequently mentions the term, but more especially descriptive is the following: "By the Pilotage of these People we row'd up an Arm of the Sound called the Back-Bay, till we came to the Head of it, there we were stopp't by a miry *Pocoson*, full half mile in Breadth, thro' which we were oblig'd to daggle on foot plungeing, now and then, tho' we pickt our Way, up to the knees in mud." The term was also frequently used by George Washington[4] (1763), for example, "Black mould taken out of the *pocoson* on the creek side."

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[1] *History of Carolina*, 1709, pp. 9, 26, 57, 115.

[2] *William and Mary College Quarterly*, vol. IV, 1895, p. 22.

[3] *History of the Dividing Line*, vol. I, 1866, p. 29.

[4] *Writings*, vol. I, 1889, p. 163.

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W. B. Rogers[1] wrote in 1836: "At *Pocosin*, a flat swampy country, which is often inundated by the tides, this deposite is uniformly met with by digging a few feet." By the adoption of the term by the colonists it was applied to all tracts of land more or less saturated or covered by water, where no Indian would have used it so commonly. This use is shown by W. C. Kerr,[2] who wrote:

"There is a large aggregate of territory (between 3000 and 4000 square miles) mostly in the counties bordering on the seas and sounds known as Swamp Lands. They are locally designated as 'dismals' or '*pocosins*,' of which the Great Dismal Swamp on the borders of North Carolina and Virginia is a good type. They differ essentially in their characteristics from ordinary swamps. They are not alluvial tracts or subject to overflow. On the contrary they occur on the divides or water sheds between rivers and sounds, and are frequently elevated . . . above the adjacent streams."

Still earlier than any of the foregoing, the term was employed in 1635 as a river designation, by B. Symmes[3] who wrote: "For the education and instruction of the children of the adjoining parishes of Elizabeth City and Kingston, from Marys Mount down to *Poquosen* river." This was in North Carolina. In 1692 a record of Virginia stated[4]: "Upon y^e^ petcon of y^e^ pishioners of new *Poquoson* in y^e^ County of York [it was ordered] y^t^ from hence forth forever hereafter y^e^ s^d^ pish Church shall be called and named Charles Church and y^e^ river formerly called New *Poquosin* River shall be for time to time and at all times hereafter be called named and written Charles River." The editor, Dr L. G. Tyler, adds to this quotation: "The change, however, only partially prevailed. The parish became known as Charles Parish but the river is known to day as *Pocosin* River." [*Pocosan*, 1775, Map of

[1] *Report of the Geological Reconnaissance of Virginia*, p. 23.
[2] *Report of the Geological Survey of N. C.*, vol. 1, 1895, p. 15.
[3] *Virginia Carolorum*, Neill, p. 113.
[4] *William and Mary College Quarterly*, vol. 1, p. 21, note.

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Virginia, by Frey and Jefferson; *Poquosin* river, and *Poquosin* flat, Coast Survey chart.]

Many similar examples, from these and other early sources could be quoted to show that the term was invariably applied to low tracts of land in close proximity to creeks or other bodies of water, and occasionally to land subject to overflow from one cause or another.

By consulting the foregoing authorities, it will be observed that the opinions of the lexicographers and others as to the meaning of *poquosin* have been based on the supposition that it was an Indian word for "a swamp or marsh." In most cases, certainly, as the extracts have indicated, such is the meaning apparently attached to it in English; but the question has lately been presented for a decisive opinion as to whether such was the actual meaning attached to it by the Indians. We say it was not, and in order to substantiate our opinion, and to show the true signification of the term, this paper has been prepared.

The word undoubtedly had its origin among the natives of the coast who spoke the Algonquian language, for it was these people with whom the colonists first came in contact. Moreover, the same identical elements, in varying dialectal or corrupt forms, employed with precisely the same descriptive meaning, and applied to similar topographic features, abound as place-name designations throughout the whole eastern Algonquian area.

Not only is this a fact, but in the lonely forests of Maine the radical again appears in its generalized sense in *pokeloken*, a word used by hunters and lumbermen to denote a marshy place or stagnant water extending into the land from a stream or lake.[1]

The question now claiming our attention relates to the analysis and etymologic derivation of the term. The first component, *poquo*, as commonly employed and as first written by Semmes in 1635, or *pèrcoar*, as rendered by Lawson in 1709, is paralleled

[1] W. R. Gerard in N. Y. *Sun*, June 30, 1895.

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by the Massachuset (Eliot) *pohqui;* Narraganset (Williams) *pauqui;* Mohegan (Pierson) *paughke;* Abnaki (Rasles) *p∞'k∞ié*, "to open out," "to widen" (primarily "to break"). The terminal *-sin* is the regularly formed diminutive in *s*, with a locative, corresponding to the Lenápe *-es-ing;* Massachuset and Narraganset *-es-et*, or *-es-it*, denoting "at or near" (something understood). Trumbull[1] remarks as to the use of the locative in *et:* "It locates not the object to the name of which it is affixed, but something else as related to that object, which must be of such a nature that location can be predicated of it." Therefore, from this analysis we have the compound word *poquo-es-in(g)*, "at or near the opening out or the widening." Compare, Otchipwe (Baraga) *pâkisse*, "it breaks open"; *pâkissin*, "it is open," plural *paiâkissing*, "it opens"; Abnaki (Rasles) *psaïnga∞essen*, "*La rivieré est pleine b'p* [*beaucoup*] *d'eau, v. g. printems.*" The application of the term, therefore, in its linguistic sense was to indicate or to describe localities where water "backed up," as in spring freshets, or in rainy seasons, which, by reason of such happenings, became necessarily more or less marshy or boggy. In a valuable list of our adopted Indian words, contributed to a New York paper (*Sun*, June 30, 1895), W. R. Gerard suggests: "The word *Poquoson* apparently means 'place where there is but little water.'" This is a very good guess, for, as we have shown, there is something "little" in the word, but it is not water.

Heckewelder,[2] in suggesting a meaning for the Virginia river "*Poccosen*," derived it from "*pduckassin* [literally round-stone], the place of balls, bullets, lead,"—a nonsensical etymology; but he was fully as far from correct in his etymology of "*Poquessing*," the Lenápe equivalent (*Poaquesson, Poetquessing, Poquessing*)[3]—a creek flowing through meadow lands toward its mouth and emptying into Delaware river between Philadelphia and Bucks

[1] *Indian Geographical Names.*

[2] *Names*, etc.

[3] *Colonial Records of Pennsylvania*, vol. I, p. 126; *Archeology of Pennsylvania*, vol. I, pp. 116, 117.

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counties, Pennsylvania,—which, he wrote, was corrupted from "*Poquesink*, the place of mice." The late Dr J. H. Trumbull[1] regarded *Poaetquessing*—an Indian village at the mouth of this creek mentioned by Campanius—as a disguised *Pawtuxet*, wherein he was mistaken, for the latter name belonged to the falls at Trenton.

On Long island, New York, four miles south of Sag Harbor, near Sagaponack, is a locality and a pond called "*Poxabog*," but more correctly termed *Paugasaboug* according to aboriginal pronunciation. Its main stem was variously written *Pougoso-*, *Pogase-*, and as *Pockgase-*, which accounts for the modern survival. A survey of 1712, laying out the land thereabouts, reads: "Runs into a Litel slade for water ner *paugaseboug*." This name is not a compound of Indian and English, neither is the terminal a "bog," as might be assumed, but is the Algonquian generic *paug*, which, in Long island Indian names, has the form *boug*, "a pond, or a water-place," the whole "an opening-out water-place"—a translation accurately describing the low boggy tract where "*Poxabog* pond" spreads out, as it is doing at the present time, being wider and more open than has been observed in some years. "*Poxabog* road," very good in dry seasons, is now three feet under water and impassable. "*Poxabog* brook," a ditch dug in the last century connecting with "Sagg pond," carries off the surplus water, otherwise the whole neighborhood would be flooded. *Quassapaug* pond, in the northwestern part of Middlebury, partly in Woodbury, Connecticut, the source of Eight-mile river,[2] is probably the equivalent of our *Paugasaboug*, and was originally *Poquassapaug*, and not, as Trumbull suggested, from "*k'che-paug*, i. e., the greatest pond."

Pocasset pond and Boggy meadow at Portland, Connecticut, have the same natural features. On modern maps it is "*Pecausset*." In a deed of 1678, it is the "boggy meadow in *Pacousett*."

[1] *Indian Geographical Names*, p. 9.

[2] Trumbull, *Names in Connecticut*, pp. 56, 60.

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Rhode Island has its quota in two "*Pocasset*" rivers: The one in Tiverton gave the name to a hill as well as to the country thereabouts, where the "*Pocasset*" sachemship had its home in former times; the other is in Johnston, and empties into Pawtucket river, just above the city of that name. There are also "*Pocasset* meadows" in Sandwich, Massachusetts. *Pequusset*, and *Pigsqusset*, were the meadows "at the widening" of Charles river, Watertown, Massachusetts, and represent other variations. "*Pecowsic*" brook, flowing down "*Pecowsic*" valley, through the "Agawam" meadows, at Springfield, Massachusetts, is another. *Pawgasett* (1642), *Paugasset* (1672), the low land and meadows at the junction of Housatonic and Naugatuck rivers at Derby, Connecticut, gave the name to the "*Paugasset*" tribe in the annals of Housatonic valley. President Stiles[1] of Yale College wrote the name, as pronounced by a *Paugasset* Indian, *Pawghkeesuck*.[2]

Among the correspondences are some with an additional prefix. For instance, at Montauk, Long island, near the "Ditch plain" Life-saving station, bordering Camp Wikoff on the southeast, lies another low tract of marsh and bog, through which a ditch was dug in the seventeenth century in order to carry off more expeditiously the "backwater," from "Great pond" into the ocean. This locality formed a boundary described in an Indian deed of 1670, and was then called *Choppausha-paugasuk*, i. e., "a place of separation where the outlet opens out or widens." The marsh was no doubt impassable in early days, and even now travel over it is by a bridge and a filled-in road.

On the northern side of Martha's Vineyard, in the town of Tisbury, is a marshy section through which flows a brook once called *Weechpoquasset*. In a deed of May 28, 1669, for the "Christian Town," it is stated: "The bounds of the said land is on the north side of Island bounded by the land called *Ichpoquassett*." In 1699 the same was "bounded on the East by *Ichpoquassett* the black water." We believe "black water," as here written

[1] Manuscript, 1761.

[2] Trumbull, *Names in Connecticut*, p. 46.

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and perpetuated in local speech, to have been an error in some way for "back water," which carries out the idea embodied in its Indian name. In 1703 a doubt arose as to its exact location, so a committee "of adged and chief Indians," of Tisbury, was appointed "to show the place that is called *Weechproquassett* creek or water on the bounds between the lands called *Chickammo* and the Sachemship of Takemmy." This committee decided "that the brook of water that runneth into the Sound being to the eastward of *Onkkokemmo* pond is the only ancient place called *Weechproquassett* and the true line." This is earlier confirmed by the grant of "Tisbury Manor," dated July 5, 1771, where "a brooke called *Each-poo-quas-sitt*" is described as the westerly bounds of *Chikkemoo*.[1] The prefix *Ich-*, *Itch-*, *Each-*, or *Weech-*, as variously written, is the Massachuset (Eliot) *Weekqs* or *Wehqs*, "as far as," the "edge," "brim,"—hence, as a whole, "as far as, or to the end of the opening out."

At the southeastern part of the town of Barrington, Rhode Island, is a neck of land now called Rumstock, but known to the Indians as *Chachapacassett*. The eastern side of the neck borders on Warren river, and has a wide margin of meadow, salt-grass, and thatch. In addition, about one-fourth of the area of the neck was subject to overflow at spring tides, and is of a marshy and boggy character. *Chacha-pacassett* (=*K'che-pacassett*) was therefore "at the great widening" of Warren river.[2]

Among the corrupt forms of apparently no connection with the subject term of this paper at first glance, are *Sowassett*, Long island, and *Poughkeepsie*, on the Hudson.

B. F. Thompson, the historian, wrote of the former[3]: "The Indian name of Port Jefferson, L. I., was *Sowassett*, and the cove between it and Setaukett was *Poquott*." After considerable inquiry as well as personal search, Thompson is the earliest

[1] Advance notes from a prospective *History of Martha's Vineyard*, by Chas. E. Banks, M. D., U. S. Marine Hosp., Washington, D. C.

[2] See Bicknell, *History of Barrington, Rhode Island*, 1898, pp. 11, 32, 36, 280.

[3] *Proceedings of the N. Y. Historical Society*, 1845, p. 131.

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authority for these two names whom we have been able to discover. They may have survived in tradition up to his day, or he may have found them in some early deed unknown to us. Whichsoever this may be, they have every appearance of some mistake according to our present view, and the two are more likely to have been an original *Poquossett*. This suggestion is apparently confirmed by the fact that Port Jefferson was earlier called "Drowned Meadow."[1]

So far as the name *Poughkeepsie* may be concerned, there appears to be absolutely no question as to its primal identity with the others, and that it was not derived, as Schoolcraft concluded, from "*Apokeepsing*, a safe harbor," as no warrant can be found for that form nor for such a translation. A deed of 1680,[2] to Arnot Veile, for the land thereabout, recites: "Beginning at a creek called *Pacaksing*, . . . to Wápangis Creek along Hudson's River northward to *Pacaksing*"—a form which, by various stages of degradation (among which are *Pocapsing* and *Poghcapsing*),[3] has finally resolved itself into *Poughkeepsie*. The survival and retention of such evolutions in Indian place-names present nothing remarkable nor surprising when we find a scholar like President Stiles writing "*Paugassett*" direct from the lips of an Indian as *Pawghkeesuck*, which was strictly in accordance with the Mohegan dialect; but such variations show the capriciousness of the early forms into which the gratuitous insertion of a letter would have made it *Pawghkee* (*p*) *suck*, from which, to *Poughkeepsie*, the transition would have been still easier even in that name.

This terminates the correspondences of "*Poquosin*," so far as it has progressed, but the list can by no means be complete. The lessons taught are the very close similarities in structure, as well as in meaning and application, among the various dialects of the Algonquian language, as spoken from its extreme limits in the south nearly to its northern boundary.

[1] Prime, *History of Long Island*, p. 226; Thompson, *History of Long Island*, vol. I, p. 432. [2] Ruttenber, *Indians of Hudson River*, p. 371.

[3] Manuscript order about roads, 1754.

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